

**Prepared remarks**  
**Michigan House of Representatives – Commerce Committee**  
**May 15, 2012**

**Carol Van Andel, Michigan Colleges Foundation board of directors:**

Good morning! Thank you for meeting with us to discuss the important topic of talent retention in Michigan.

I'm Carol Van Andel, a member of the Michigan Colleges Foundation board of directors and its liaison with the Van Andel Millennial Board.

I think we all know that talent trumps all. States and cities with talented people seem to thrive, identifying challenges, attacking them head-on and innovating solutions. Michigan is a state built on talented people. Many of our most talented people created industry giants – from the Big Three and the top office furniture companies to major players like Bissell, Dow, Meijer, Quicken Loans, Gordon Food Service and Amway. Unfortunately, Michigan has seen its share of talent leave the state during recent years. You know the often referenced statistic, but I'll repeat it – Michigan was the only state to lose population from 2000 to 2010. And many of those who were leaving were college graduates who decided to take their talents elsewhere. We all know one, and likely several recent college graduates who packed up for the big city – for opportunity and experience.

Some have chosen to put their heads in the sand, saying things like “they’ll be back” and “it’s a great place to raise a family.” Well, Michigan is a great place to raise a family. In fact, my hometown of Grand Rapids was recently ranked the second-best place in the nation to raise a family. But that’s not the point. The point is that many of those who left will never find out because they won’t be back.

Others have decided that they are going to do something about the brain drain. I can't tell you how many meetings I've sat in where we've talked about what we could do to retain talent. We all have ideas and many of them seem pretty good as we sit around a boardroom table. But we were missing a key ingredient. We were missing the voice of the soon-to-be graduates who we are seeking to keep. In fact, we were simply guessing at what students thought, what they needed, and what they wanted. Well, I'm proud to say that we have stopped the guessing game with the Van Andel Millennial Board.

The Millennial Board is made up of 14 of the top college students in the state, one from each of the private colleges that make up the Michigan Colleges Foundation. Each student is selected by his or her college's president to serve on the board.

These students are dynamic. They are leaders on their campuses and future leaders in their chosen industries. The Van Andel Millennial Board started its work by teaming up with a research firm that has an expertise in Millennials – those who are 29 years of age and younger. Working with the research firm, the students surveyed more than 3,800 college students and found out two very important things. First, what students needed in a community. And secondly, if they believed that they could find those things in Michigan and its major cities including Detroit, Grand Rapids and Lansing.

The results, to be shared in detail by other speakers in the coming minutes, are eye opening. They paint a picture for the types of places that will attract recent graduates - places that are a mix of traditional values such as good jobs, affordable housing and low crime with those factors typically touted by cool city advocates, such as mass transportation, cultural activities, nightlife, and diverse cultures.

Most of all, it gives us a roadmap for showcasing how our state matches up with the needs and wants of our soon-to-be graduates ... A means for dispelling myths about the state and a method for opening up students' eyes to the opportunities really available here.

Over the next year, we'll be working with this group to showcase the "real Michigan," a place that meets the needs of college graduates. It is an exciting time and I'm pleased for you to hear the rest of the testimony that shares our plans and our views in greater detail, as well as answering any questions that you may have.

Thanks again for your time. I would now like to turn it over to Dr. Jeffrey Docking, president of Adrian College.

**Dr. Jeffrey Docking, president of Adrian College:**

Members of the House Committee on Commerce, thank you for providing me with a few moments to discuss talent retention in our state and the efforts of the Van Andel Millennial Board.

---

At Adrian College, and all of the 14 independent colleges and universities that make up the Michigan Colleges Foundation, we take our role in the development of talent for our regions very seriously. On an almost daily basis, we are connecting with employers in our state to stay on the leading edge of workforce needs, the trends that are emerging, and to learn how we can better prepare our students for the working world in Michigan. One example is MCF's Talent Assessment Project which is identifying the needs of corporate Michigan in hiring recent college grads and interns and aligning those needs with our academic programs.

On the flip side, our college placement services provide great support to our ever-growing student base to best position students for employment. From assistance with resumes to mock interviews, our staff helps these students to be prepared for the working world.

But what area colleges haven't touched on is what the Van Andel Millennial Board is doing ... The piece of the pie connected to perceptions of Michigan, understanding of the state as a whole and its individual urban centers that are likely places for our students to live after college.

The void that the Van Andel Millennial Board is starting to fill is a huge one, one that I fear has done great harm to our state as car after car driven by college graduate after college graduate crosses the state line for perceived greener pastures. The reasons behind these students' departures are something that the Millennial Board's research outlines clearly. In fact, it is staggering information.

Since we're in the state capitol, let's just look at the Lansing market.

According to the Millennial Board's research, less than a quarter of students surveyed believe that Lansing offers:

- Affordable housing, rent and amenities
- An economy that is stable and offers good jobs
- Strong schools and lifelong learning opportunities
- Plenty of things to do after hours
- An ease of transportation involving multiple modes of transit

Less than one in four believe they can find those things here. I think they can.

The numbers for Detroit are worse, with 11 percent or less believing that it offers affordability, strong schools, after-hours activities and ease of transportation.

It is this type of information that is needed to identify myths and, in turn create opportunities for our students to have a better understanding of the general marketplace. The Millennial Board is one of those ways...

I've seen many statistics referencing the fact that the state will need approximately 1 million more college-educated workers by 2025, just 13 years from now ... averaged out, that's about 77,000 more college educated individuals needed each year.

We're training more and more students now, but the unanswered question is "how do we keep them in Michigan after graduation?".

I believe the work of the Millennial Board is part of the answer.

In addition to home-grown talent, another important piece to the equation is out-of-state students who come to Michigan to attend college. Nearly 30 percent of the college students who took the Millennial Board's survey were out-of-state residents who decided to attend college in Michigan. And, unfortunately, they stated that they were much more likely to leave after graduation as well. We need to change that.

Some of this is based on perception, what they hear from their student peers who grew up in Michigan. According to the Millennial Board's research, only 18 percent of students were considered active promoters of Michigan, while 41 percent were considered detractors. Benchmarked against other states, Michigan trails significantly in the balance between college aged students who are promoters versus detractors of the state.

Which brings me back to the work of the Millennial Board ... This is a group that is doing things, that is creating action and will spread their message to the people who we're hoping to educate about Michigan – their peers.

I was pleased to read a recent blog post on [TheVanAndelMillennialBoard.com](http://TheVanAndelMillennialBoard.com) from the Adrian College representative. She was discussing the board's recent two-day trip to Grand Rapids where she was exposed to an array of organizations, leaders and facts. The post highlighted her lack of knowledge of the Grand Rapids market prior to the visit, the experiences that opened her eyes to great possibilities during the tour and her desire to share what she's learned with others at our school some two hours away from Furniture City.

I'm excited to see the continued growth of the Millennial Board and hope that you will leverage their work in leading our state.

Thank you for listening to my thoughts on the important matter of talent retention. I think you'll find the words of the Millennial Board's chair, Casey Hoffman, especially interesting. Casey...

---

#### **Casey Hoffman, Albion College student and Van Andel Millennial Board chair:**

Good morning and thank you for allowing me to spend a few minutes sharing with you the work of the Michigan Colleges Foundation's Van Andel Millennial Board.

My name is Casey Hoffman and I am the President of the Millennial Board. As of ten days ago, I am a graduate of Albion College. I am also a yooper. I am a native of Menominee in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and as a life-long Michigander, I have a special connection this state. I've grown up here. I'm connected here. I love living here. And it is for these reasons that the mission of the Van Andel Millennial Board is

so very important to me—we are a group of students dedicated to bring about positive change in Michigan, which includes retaining and attracting young talent.

I want to talk to you today about what I believe to be one of the largest challenges we face in recreating our state—the unfortunate and often untrue negative stereotype that Michigan's young people often associate with Michigan. In truth, those who have spent their childhoods in Michigan and now attend college here are sometimes critical of our state because they believe it doesn't offer the opportunities that they'll need to live a successful and enjoyable life.

Perception becomes reality in many instances. And the perception of Michigan is not good amongst soon-to-be college graduates.

Recall that these are individuals who grew up as the auto industry was collapsing. The same students who might have seen their parents, their friend's parents or someone close to them lose a job ... as part of a series of events that resulted in double-digit unemployment rates. These are the students who lived through continuous reductions in K-12 state aid, with teachers being laid off in some instances as a result.

Parents ... loved ones ... family friends ... educators ... these are the people in students' lives who have been negatively impacted in the past decade. This all contributes to a narrative that Michigan doesn't have much to offer.

We are here today to discuss our efforts to combat that negative narrative and instead retain our state's talent – specifically students like me; young people who are graduating and determining where they will go next, begin a career and launch a life.

The Millennial Board began this dialogue by conducting a survey with fellow students at 14 private colleges and universities across the state. Through our efforts, we connected with more than 3,800 students to ask them a variety of questions about their desires for the community that they will call "home" after graduation. We then we asked if they thought those desires were available in Michigan, in particular in some of our largest urban areas, including Detroit, Grand Rapids and right here in Lansing.

Our research quantifies the negative perception of Michigan in several instances. Most revealingly, only 11 percent of college students agreed that Michigan's economy is stable and offers good jobs, broad choices of places to work, and an environment that is friendly to entrepreneurs. Yet, to the contrary, nearly 90 percent of students said that they would seek such a community when determining where they would start their post-college lives.

Our research highlighted the various aspects of states, cities and communities that are important to soon-to-be college graduates. To some people's surprise, things like cost of living, earnings potential, low crime and strong schools topped the list of what students are looking for.

But nearly as important were the more glamorous items frequently touted by Millennial experts. Things like:

Vibrant communities with parks, trails and recreations;

After-hours activities, including authentic local places to have dinner, meet for coffee, hear live music, and visit galleries;

And communities that are easy to navigate, with multiple modes of transportation including public transit, bike lanes, and walkable communities.

Our research showed that talent retention isn't a "this or that" scenario. Our peers seemingly want it all, and believe that jobs, affordability, safety, good schools, vibrant communities and multiple modes of transportation can be found together.

When asked which cities were in consideration for "life after graduation," places like Chicago, New York, Denver, Boston, Washington, D.C., Seattle and Portland all ranked highly on the list.

But here's the good news – Grand Rapids was the top city listed, with Holland ranking third and Ann Arbor fourth. And more than half of students like me, ones that grew up here in Michigan, said they are considering staying in state after graduation. Another 30 percent said they are unsure of their plans. That's nearly 90 percent of students from Michigan who could still be convinced to stay here.

The question is: How do we convince students to stay in Michigan? How do we take this willingness to consider the state, despite a belief that it doesn't offer specific things that students desire, and retain young talent?

---

We believe it starts with seeing the "real Michigan" for ourselves.

Members of the Van Andel Millennial Board recently toured Grand Rapids during a two-day trip in an effort to see our state's second largest city. We met with the city's mayor, the head of the chamber, the chairman of a major office furniture company, and young, dynamic leaders who are guiding some of the top nonprofits in the area. We toured the region's central station for bus transportation and visited its operations center. We attended a networking session with local elected officials and ate at locally owned and operated restaurants.

What we saw was a city that matched all of the aspects demanded by our peers in our research.

Later today, we'll continue this grass-roots effort by meeting with some of the top young leaders in our state, including two of your peers who are serving in their first term in the state House and are in their 20s. Additionally, we'll visit a locally owned restaurant and tour some of Lansing's downtown area.

This is just the start. In the coming year, we'll ramp up our visits to major urban areas, top employers, and hubs for entrepreneurs. And we'll take what we see back to our college campuses and share it on our blog, [TheVanAndelMillennialBoard.com](http://TheVanAndelMillennialBoard.com).

I believe our work can serve as a model for the state, helping to organically spread details about what life is really like here. I hope you will continue to watch as we grow our movement. I also hope you will spread the message about our work, so more students can benefit from it. In the end, it may be a piece of the puzzle in helping the state reach its full potential. In fact, it might be part of a powerful economic development effort. After all, a recent report stated that 58% of a city's success, as measured by per capita income, can be attributed to post-secondary degree attainment.

Frankly, I think we learn a lot about our character during troubled times. No one said life would be seamless or smooth. As a state, we have had setbacks and false-starts. At some point, we may say to ourselves "I can't do it...it's too hard...I'm just not up to the task." No exceptions. No excuses. It is the Michigan mentality to reject can't-do claims and to choose instead to stretch the boundaries of the possible through hard work, determination, and a pioneering spirit. Let's always aim high, work hard, and care deeply about what you believe in---and when we stumble, keep faith...and when we're knocked down, get right back up...and never listen to anyone who says we can't or shouldn't go on.

Michigan has made the decision to stand by young people. Now, young people need to make the decision to stand by Michigan. That is what the Van Andel Millennial Board is all about—restoring the ties that bind us together. There is no doubt in my mind that Michigan's best days are still to come—and those days depend on us. Together, we will write the next chapter in our state's story. We will stand together for the ideals we share, the values we cherish, and the state we love. After all, there's nothing more Michigan than that.

Lastly, my presence at this committee hearing would not be possible without the time, talent, and dedication of two very special people—David and Carol Van Andel. Their involvement is, in my opinion, one of the most significant reasons why young people

across our state are becoming more engaged than ever in Michigan's future, and their hope in the next generation will no doubt yield a better future Michigan for all of us.

I again want to thank you for your time today. I'm also excited to introduce our next speaker, Mary Kramer – publisher of Crain's Detroit Business and a member of the Michigan Colleges Foundation board of directors. Mary has been a valuable ally in our work, especially in Detroit. She gets it and knows the Detroit business community better than almost anyone. Mary...

**Mary Kramer, Publisher of Crain's Detroit Business and MCF Board Member:**

Thank you, Casey... And thank you to the members of the commerce committee for meeting with us.

The research conducted by the Van Andel Millennial Board in partnership with Next Generation Consulting is truly unique and provides our state with a much better understanding of the values that college students have regarding "place" and the perceptions that they have of Michigan. Now, it is ALL of our jobs to do something with it.

Some employers are.....

Dan Gilbert, founder of Quicken Loans, has bought 5 office buildings in downtown Detroit. It's not an act of Charity. At a Crain-sponsored conference in March, he said he did it because a vibrant downtown – with sports teams, restaurants, bars and activity – would help him attract talent.

Young talent, he said, did NOT want the view his company had at their old digs in Livonia....which was the roof of a Costco store across the street.

As the publisher of Michigan's largest business newspaper, I know that we, as business journalists, need to link employers with their future talent base.

---

That's one reason we've created our "20 in their 20s" recognition program.

Just last week, we honored this year's "class" of 20-somethings. They included a restaurant owner, entrepreneur who created a Green company that's landing contracts with the Big 3 automakers, an engineer and a handful of Web wonks.

These folks could live ANYWHERE and they choose to live and work in metro Detroit.

Here are some of the words they used to describe their environs:



"Thrilling." "Inspiring." "Evolving." "Anything's possible." "We're reinventing what used to be." "There's so much competition in Chicago and New York; you can DO something here."

You can find a short video of these inspiring 20-somethings here....and I brought copies of this year's awards issue:

<http://www.crainsdetroit.com/section/twenties12>

THESE 20-somethings see Detroit through the lens of opportunities: Ground floor, low barriers, less competition.

But those opportunities are the "unknown" for many college students. Earlier this school year, we had more than 80 students, including a few members of the Van Andel Millennial Board, bussed into Detroit from MCF campuses across the state to learn of Detroit career opportunities and directly experience the growing vibrancy of the downtown area.

The students visited rapidly growing businesses in Detroit such as ePrize and Compuware, and heard from representatives from those companies, as well as from Quicken Loans, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and *Crain's Detroit Business*. They met young professionals who are doing big things in Detroit. They saw for themselves how they can be leaders in the city and state's emerging economy, not just one of the crowd.

Now some of the MCF students are now pursuing opportunities with these and other Detroit companies. They never would have done so if they hadn't visited, they simply didn't know about the opportunities in Michigan's largest city.

That is more the rule than the exception. Most people from outside of Detroit who I come in contact with are shocked to learn that the city isn't a bunch of burned out buildings with no opportunities to build a life and career. They don't seem to know of the revitalization occurring in Detroit....how Dan Gilbert and others are investing in downtown, how big companies like Chrysler and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan are expanding or moving back downtown and bringing lots of workers with them.

Many businesses in the Detroit-area are growing. Almost as many have a hard time attracting the talent that they need to fill the jobs that they have available.

Governor Snyder talks about the 70,000-plus jobs that are available in Michigan today. Many of them are in Detroit. It all goes back to the need for college-educated individuals. There is a reason that only 4.3 percent of those with college degrees are unemployed nationally.

So, as Casey said ... how do we get there? How do we become a place that is known, isn't feared and is seen for its plentiful opportunities?

The Van Andel Millennial Board is part of the answer. But you are as well. It is incumbent that our state takes a look at what is needed for a state, a city, a community to succeed. It takes talent. With talent, everything else seems to fall into place.

Until recently, the state took the approach that recruiting employers to the market would lead to reductions in unemployment and the growth of vibrant communities. That isn't necessarily the case.

We need to GROW OUR OWN companies....What Gov. Snyder calls "Economic Gardening."

And companies need TALENT to win.

We need to take a look at how to best position the state to college graduates. And we need to start with students who are currently studying in Michigan ... whether they grew up here or not.

How can we market ourselves to them, broadly?

There is a saying in business. It is easier to keep your current customers than it is to attract new ones. The same is true in workforce and economic development; it is more cost-effective to retain the young talent already living, studying and working in Michigan than to convince new migrants to relocate to Michigan.

We need broader support for scholarships. For internships. For post-college technical training, if necessary.

A smart investment in Michigan's future is to invest in the college students that Casey referenced ... Those students who are considering staying in Michigan upon graduation or who are unsure of their plans. Keep them here. If they stay, our economy, our cities and our state will boom.

---

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my thoughts. We really appreciate your attention to this important matter. I know that the others, as well as myself, would love to answer any questions that you may have.

# Keeping College Graduates in Michigan

Michigan Colleges Foundation  
Student Survey Findings

April 13, 2011

next 

Next Generation Consulting



MICHIGAN  
COLLEGES  
FOUNDATION

Keeping College Graduates in Michigan

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Rationale: Why this project? Why now?.....2

Next Cities & The Seven Indexes.....3

Overview: Survey Demographics .....4

Key Findings: What Did We Learn?

    1. Overall, Michigan natives are committed to staying in the state but they are not  
    “ambassadors” of the state. ....5

    2. The perceptions students have of Michigan and the regions of Detroit, Grand Rapids, and  
    Lansing are not measuring up to their values and may hinder the state’s ability to retain  
    students following graduation. ....6

    3. The perceived lack of “Earning” opportunities in Michigan is the primary reason college  
    graduates will leave the state. ....13

    4. Educating students about life after college in Michigan will require word of mouth,  
    technology, and carefully crafted visits.....13

    5. Promoting specific quality of life amenities - like good-paying jobs, affordable housing,  
    commute times, access to parks, bike and hike trails - is key to marketing post-graduate life  
    in Michigan. ....15

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?: .....16

## RATIONALE | Why This Project? Why Now?

In the State of Michigan, nearly 50% of the more than 300,000 students educated by its 15 public universities will leave the state upon graduation.<sup>1</sup>

The steady leak of talent out of Michigan is not new. From 2000-2010, Michigan was the only state in the nation to lose population.<sup>2</sup>

This is a trend that must be addressed, and if possible, reversed. Research shows that 58 percent of a city's success, as measured by per capita income, can be attributed to post-secondary degree attainment<sup>3</sup>.

For Michigan to grow its economy, it must engage and retain its college graduates before they decide to leave, while there's still time:

"For Michigan's turnaround, the ability to attract, engage and retain talent is a linchpin. Connecting students in personal and meaningful ways to Michigan's future before they graduate and plan their lives elsewhere is a critical component to the state's economic transformation, particularly for our major urban centers."

- Michigan Colleges Foundation, Partnership for Michigan

To address this transformation, the central questions of this study were:



*Why - and how - do Michigan college students form their opinions about Michigan communities? What can we do to address their perceptions, and reposition Michigan as a smart choice for smart graduates? What - beyond jobs - do they value in "cool communities?"*

Certainly, jobs are important to retain Michigan's college graduates. But, as many 20-somethings will tell you, "there's more to life than work." This study also addressed students' perceptions of seven quality of life indexes, as outlined on the following page.

---

<sup>1</sup> ["Slowing the Brain Drain"](#), by Dustin Walsh

<sup>2</sup> [2010 Census shows Michigan's population declined since 2000](#)

<sup>3</sup> CEO's For Cities, source: <http://www.ceosforcities.org/blog/entry/2976/ceos-for-cities-launches-the-talent-dividend-prize>

## NEXT CITIES & THE SEVEN INDEXES

Next Cities™ are places (states/cities/regions) with the assets and amenities that attract and keep a young, educated workforce. Think bustling downtowns, walkable neighborhoods, diverse career opportunities, and a vibrant art and music scene. Next Cities™ are places the next generation proudly calls “home” because they nurture the attributes the next generation values. Next Generation Consulting (“Next Generation”) groups these attributes into Seven Indexes:

**Cost of Lifestyle** | Recent graduates and young professionals are just getting started in their careers, and for many, affordability is key. This index includes variables that encapsulate a roof over the head and food on the table.

**Earning** | High school guidance counselors tell students that they’ll have between nine and eleven jobs in their lifetime. The Earning index considers Michigan’s average household income, the percentage of jobs in the knowledge-based sector, and more.

**Learning** | Is Michigan committed to high quality education for all of its residents? This index considers educational expenditures, student-teacher ratio, educational attainment, Wi-Fi hotspots, and more.

**Social Capital** | Great talent comes in every race, creed, and color. This index accounts for how open, safe, and accessible the state is to all people. It includes measures of diversity, integration, and crime rates.

**Vitality** | How committed is Michigan to an active and healthy lifestyle? This index considers water quality, air quality, physicians per capita, farmers’ markets, and dog parks.

**After Hours** | There’s more to life than work. This index considers the places to go and things to do after work and on weekends in Michigan’s communities.

**Around Town** | How easy is it to get to where you want to go in Michigan? This index considers “walkability,” commute times, public transit usage, and more.

## OVERVIEW | Survey Demographics

The Michigan Colleges Foundation (MCF) Survey was open from February 21, 2011, until March 13, 2011. Students from MCF's fourteen member institutions participated and a total of 3,825<sup>4</sup> completed responses were captured.

Survey participants were asked general demographic and perception based questions about Michigan and their plans following graduation. Participants were also randomized into three survey "branches" - Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing - and were asked a set of perception questions specific to each region.

### At a quick glance, respondents were:

- Upper class-men (59% have a Junior, Senior, or 5th Year Senior class standing)
- Female (71%)
- White/Caucasian (86%)
- Average age of 21.9
- Michigan Natives (71%)
- Attending:

Adrian College	4%
Albion College	5%
Alma College	7%
Andrews University	8%
Aquinas College	16%
Calvin College	10%
Hillsdale College	8%
Hope College	19%
Kalamazoo College	2%
Madonna University	2%
Marygrove College	2%
Olivet College	2%
Siena Heights University	3%
Spring Arbor University	12%

### Relationship to Michigan

Of the total respondents, 71% have lived in Michigan for more than half their lives and 29% are not originally from the state. Of the Michigan "natives" over half (54%) are from rural or small communities compared to only 38% of non-natives.

The majority (72%) of respondents had no relationship to the region in which the survey "branched" their questioning. Those that were from the region grew up in the larger metro area, not within the city boundaries.

---

<sup>4</sup> In total, more than 4,500 responses were collected. Only 3,825 were complete, valid responses.



## KEY FINDINGS | What did we learn?

1. Overall, Michigan natives are committed to staying in the state but they are not “ambassadors” of the state.

When considering the state's ability to retain current Michigan natives, the survey results show that Michigan is performing well. More than half of natives (59%) said they are considering staying in the state after graduation. Only 11% of Michigan natives indicated they plan on leaving the state, however, 30% said they are unsure about their plans. This means Michigan has the potential to keep 89% of students originally from the state.

Furthermore, when respondents were asked what cities in which they were considering living after graduation, many Michigan cities ranked high on the list. Figure 1, is a “word cloud” image. This visual gives greater prominence to cities that were listed more frequently.

**Figure 1: Cities in Consideration for “Life After Graduation”**



As the word cloud depicts, several Michigan communities rank high on students' lists of places to live after graduation. Grand Rapids, MI was the top named city followed by Chicago, IL; Holland, MI; Ann Arbor, MI; Seattle, WA; and Denver, CO. Other cities frequently listed were Lansing, MI; Boston, MA; Detroit, MI; Washington D.C.; and New York, NY.

Although these findings fare well for the state's efforts to retain its existing native-student population, the state struggles in developing these students as promoters for Michigan.

There is no better way to retain non-native students to Michigan than to create “ambassadors” - loyal customers - who are proud to be from Michigan and share the good reasons to call Michigan “home.”

Next Generation uses the Net Promoter Score (NPS)<sup>5</sup> to measure respondents' likelihood – on a scale of 0 to 10 – to promote Michigan to friends or family who are considering staying/relocating.

---

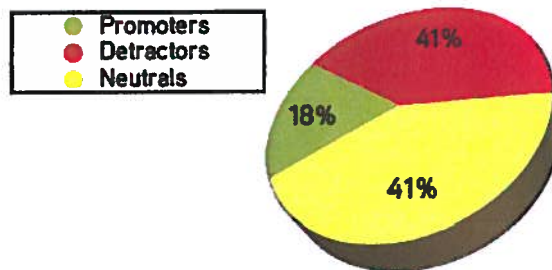
<sup>5</sup> The Net Promoter Score is based on years of research on customer loyalty and profitability spanning several industries and decades. To learn more about the Net Promoter Score and how it's being used by a variety of industries, see <http://www.netpromoter.com/>.



Respondents who rate their likelihood of promoting the state with a 9 or 10 are considered “promoters.” Respondents who give a score of 6 or less are considered “detractors.” Scores of 7 or 8 are considered neutral and do not count toward the NPS. We calculate the NPS by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters, as follows: Net Promoter Score (NPS) = % Promoters – % Detractors

For current students (Michigan natives) in Michigan, 41% were detractors and 18% were promoters, resulting in an NPS of -23%<sup>6</sup>. See Figure 2. This is 22 points below the average community NPS of -1%<sup>7</sup>.

**Figure 2: State of Michigan’s Net Promoter Score: Michigan Natives**



**2. The perceptions students have of Michigan and the regions of Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing are not measuring up to their values and may hinder the state’s ability to retain students following graduation.**

Overall, respondents have a relatively positive outlook for Michigan’s economy and quality of life. They see Michigan’s economy improving in the future and agree that it is a great place to live and work. However, when respondents were asked questions about specific quality of life categories, a different story emerged.

Survey respondents were asked two questions about the Seven Indexes of a Next City™ (described on page 3.), as they apply to the state and three regions:

- ➔ How important are these categories/amenities to you? [This question determines the amenity’s *value* to the respondent.]
- ➔ How well does Michigan along with the regions of Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing provide these amenities? [This determines the respondent’s *perception* of the amenity’s existence.]

Table 1, page 7, ranks the Seven Indexes of a Next City™ according to their value for all respondents. The “value” level represents the percent of respondents who chose “most important” or “somewhat important” for each index.

<sup>6</sup> NPS scores were also captured for each region. Results: Grand Rapids, -49%; Detroit, -91%; and Lansing, -83%.

<sup>7</sup> Taken from a sample of seven U.S. cities: Grand Forks (ND); Des Moines (IA); Wichita (KS); Omaha (NE); and Cincinnati (OH); Rochester (MN); and Canton (OH).

**Table 1: Student Values for the Seven Indexes of a Next City™**

Index	Value
<b>COST OF LIFESTYLE:</b> I want a community where I can afford to live, work, and play (affordable housing/rent and amenities).	94%
<b>EARNING:</b> I want a stable economy with good jobs, a broad choice of places to work, and an environment that is friendly to entrepreneurs.	90%
<b>LEARNING:</b> I want to plug into a smart community with strong schools (K-12 and lifelong learning opportunities (higher education & personal enrichment)	84%
<b>SOCIAL CAPITAL:</b> I value living in a safe (low crime) and diverse community, with other young people. Where all people are engaged and involved in community life.	83%
<b>VITALITY:</b> I value living in a vibrant community where people are kind to the environment, healthy, and "out and about" - using public parks, trails, recreation areas, and attending farmers' markets.	82%
<b>AFTER HOURS:</b> I want plenty to do with authentic local places to have dinner, meet for coffee, hear live music, visit galleries, attend theatre, or just hang out.	77%
<b>AROUND TOWN:</b> I want to live in a community that's connected and easy to navigate using multiple modes of transit including foot, bike, car, and bus (walkable neighborhoods/downtown, bike lanes, public transit, etc.).	76%

Students value Cost of Lifestyle more than any other index followed by Earning and Learning.

This matches recent findings by Next Generation which identified that under-40s will choose 'Cost of Lifestyle' as the single most important factor when choosing where to live, e.g. nationally, 96% say it's either 'Very Important' or 'Somewhat Important'.

Figure 3, offers another way of looking at the value students place on each index. This spider diagram is what Next Generation calls a "Handprint". This particular handprint shows the level of value, on a scale of 0-10, that Michigan students place on each index.

**Figure 3: Michigan Student's Value Level Handprint**

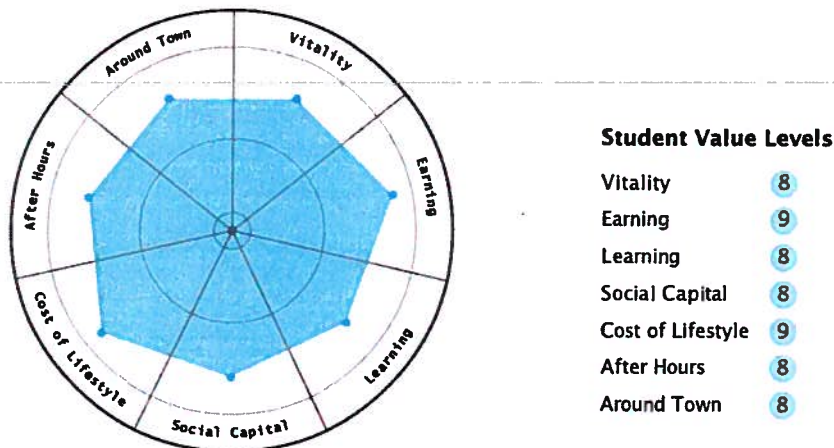


Table 2, compares students' perceptions of the state and three regions and offers an average variance compared to the value level for each index and overall. The "perception" level represents the percent of respondents who chose "completely agree" or "agree" with how well the state and each region offer amenities in each index. (A ranking of specific attributes within each Index can be found on pages 16-17.)

**Table 2: Student Perceptions for State & Regions in the Seven Indexes of a Next City™**

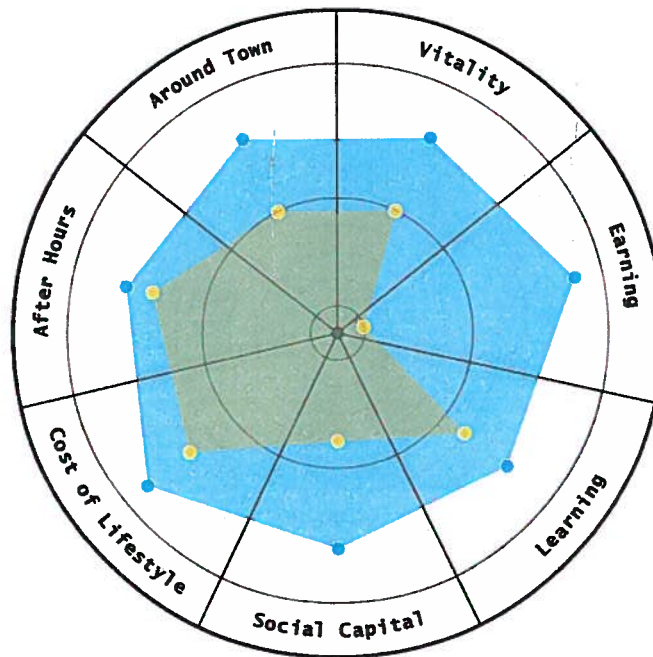
Index	Value	Perception				Average Variance from Value per Index
		Michigan	Detroit	Grand Rapids	Lansing	
<b>COST OF LIFESTYLE:</b> I can afford to live, work, and play in [Michigan/Detroit/Grand Rapids/Lansing] (affordable housing/rent and amenities).	94%	69%	11%	46%	21%	-56%
<b>EARNING:</b> [Michigan/Detroit/Grand Rapids/Lansing]'s economy is stable and offers good jobs, broad choices of places to work, and an environment that is friendly to entrepreneurs.	89%	11%	34%	38%	24%	-63%
<b>LEARNING:</b> I believe [Michigan/Detroit/Grand Rapids/Lansing] offers strong schools (K-12) and lifelong learning opportunities (higher education & personal enrichment).	84%	64%	10%	46%	23%	-46%
<b>SOCIAL CAPITAL:</b> [Michigan/Detroit/Grand Rapids/Lansing]'s communities are safe (low crime) and diverse, with other young people. All people are engaged and involved in community life.	83%	42%	34%	55%	36%	-37%
<b>VITALITY:</b> [Michigan/Detroit/Grand Rapids/Lansing]'s communities are vibrant communities, where people are kind to the environment, healthy, and "out and about" - using public parks, trails, recreation areas, and attending farmer's markets.	82%	54%	54%	71%	44%	-30%
<b>AFTER HOURS:</b> [Michigan/Detroit/Grand Rapids/Lansing] offers plenty to do with authentic local places to have dinner, meet for coffee, hear live music, visit galleries, attend theatre, or just hang out.	77%	67%	8%	43%	24%	-46%
<b>AROUND TOWN:</b> [Michigan/Detroit/Grand Rapids/Lansing]'s communities are connected and easy to navigate using multiple modes of transit including foot, bike, car, air, and bus (walkable neighborhoods/downtown, bike lanes, public transit, etc.).	76%	51%	7%	32%	23%	-49%
<b>Average Variance for all Indexes compared to Value for Michigan &amp; Regions</b>	84%	-32%	-61%	-36%	-56%	-46%

In looking at the variances in Table 2, page 8, the closer the difference is to "0," the better the match between respondent's value for that index, and their perception that the index is strong. The average variance between value and perception for all indexes in the state and the three regions is -46%. Ideally, the variance for each index would be less than 15%.

This indicates the State of Michigan has significant perception problems with gaps in all seven indexes, the largest being the low perception of Earning opportunities in the state. This Earning gap along with the overall gap is impacting Michigan's ability to retain college graduates and it must be addressed to keep students in the state following graduation.

Figures 4-7, takes Figure 3: Michigan Student's Value Level Handprint, and lays the perception levels on top of it to provide a visual diagram of the variances between value and perception in each index for the State of Michigan, Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing.

**Figure 4: State of Michigan Value vs. Perception Diagram**



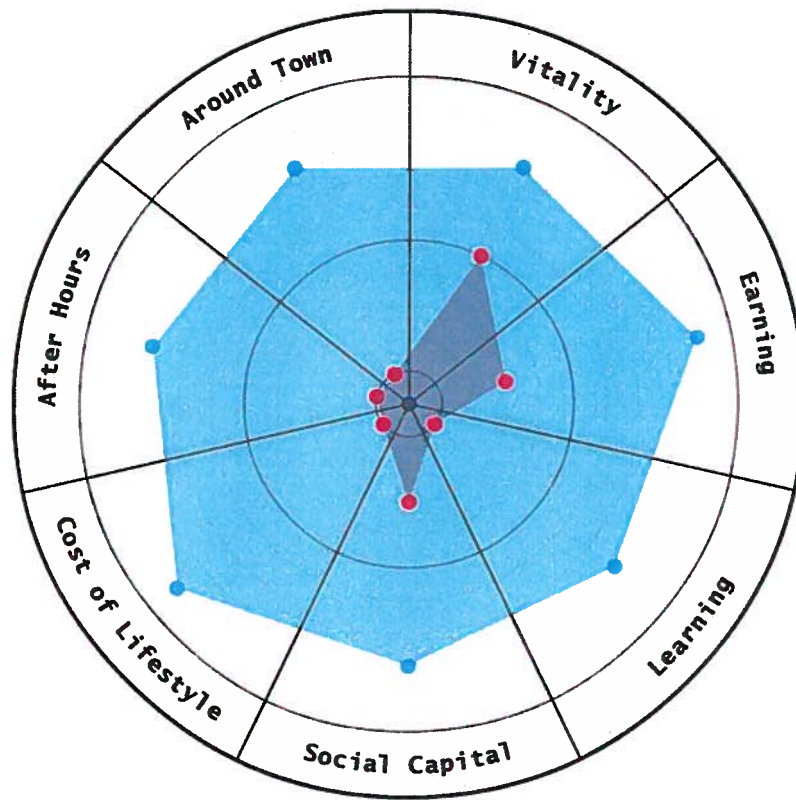
#### State of Michigan

Overall Values		Michigan Perceptions	
Vitality	8	Vitality	5
Earning	9	Earning	1
Learning	8	Learning	6
Social Capital	8	Social Capital	4
Cost of Lifestyle	9	Cost of Lifestyle	7
After Hours	8	After Hours	7
Around Town	8	Around Town	5

© 2009 Next Generation Consulting

In looking at Figure 5 below, you can see the Detroit region suffers from the biggest perception problem among the three regions. Detroit's average variance between value and perception is -61%, with the largest variances in Cost of Lifestyle (-82%) and Learning (-74%). On the flip side, respondents saw some potential in Detroit's Vitality opportunities with the lowest variance among the indexes at -28%.

**Figure 5: Detroit Region Value vs. Perception Diagram**



#### Detroit Region

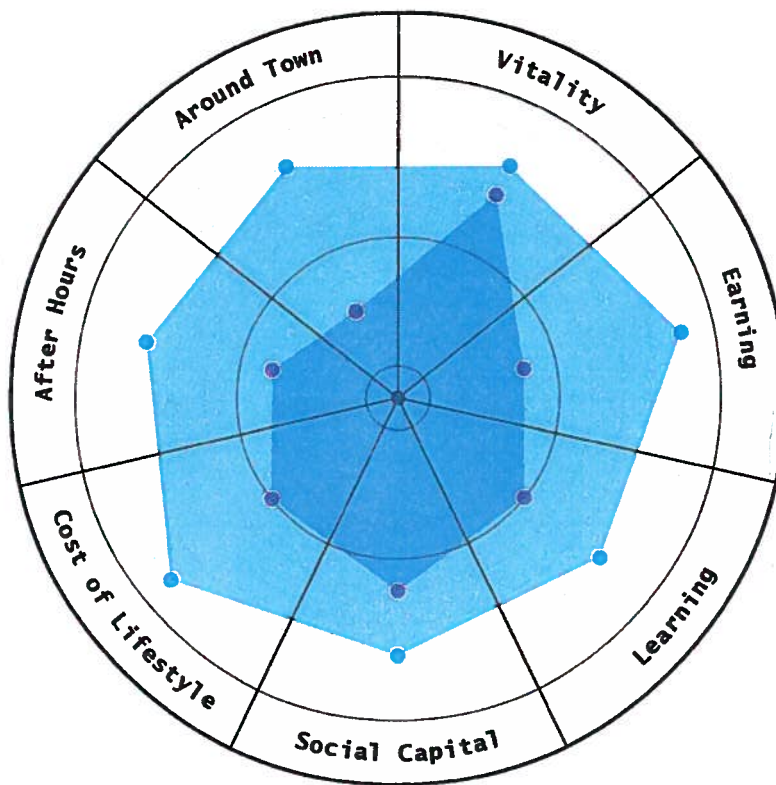
Overall Values		Detroit Perceptions	
Vitality	8	Vitality	5
Earning	9	Earning	3
Learning	8	Learning	1
Social Capital	8	Social Capital	3
Cost of Lifestyle	9	Cost of Lifestyle	1
After Hours	8	After Hours	1
Around Town	8	Around Town	1

© 2009 Next Generation Consulting



Among the three regions, Grand Rapids ranked at the top with an average variance between value and perception of -36%, compared to Detroit's (-61%) and Lansing's (-56%). Grand Rapids largest variances were in Earning (-52%) and Cost of Lifestyle (-48%) . However, although a perception problem exists overall, as Figure 6 shows, Grand Rapids can “play-up” on its strong perception in Vitality. Seventy-one percent of respondents agree Grand Rapids is a vibrant community.

**Figure 6: Grand Rapids Value vs. Perception Diagram**



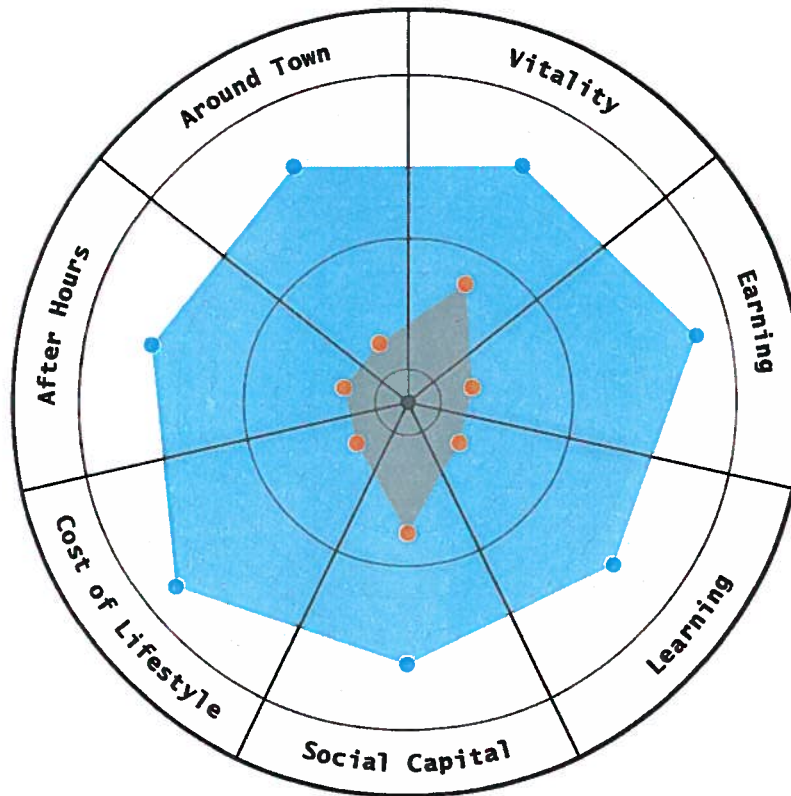
#### Grand Rapids Region

Overall Values		G.R. Perceptions	
Vitality	8	Vitality	7
Earning	9	Earning	4
Learning	8	Learning	5
Social Capital	8	Social Capital	6
Cost of Lifestyle	9	Cost of Lifestyle	5
After Hours	8	After Hours	4
Around Town	8	Around Town	3

© 2009 Next Generation Consulting

Figure 7, provides a visual for the variances in each index for the Lansing region. Like Detroit, Lansing battles a big perception problem with an average variance between value and perception of -56%. The largest variances are in Cost of Lifestyle (-73%) and Earning (-65%). Lansing's lowest variances were in Vitality (-39%) and Social Capital (-47%).

**Figure 7: Lansing Region Value vs. Perception Diagram**



#### Lansing Region

Overall Values		Lansing Perceptions	
Vitality	8	Vitality	4
Earning	9	Earning	2
Learning	8	Learning	2
Social Capital	8	Social Capital	4
Cost of Lifestyle	9	Cost of Lifestyle	2
After Hours	8	After Hours	2
Around Town	8	Around Town	2

© 2009 Next Generation Consulting

Typically, Next Generation would recommend focusing any marketing efforts on highlighting the strengths of each region. For example, Grand Rapids is currently the most appealing region based on perception levels, and has strengths in Vitality that can be leveraged.

However, prior to launching any marketing efforts, it would be wise for the state and each region to determine if these perception issues are in fact the reality or if they are just misguided perceptions. If it's the reality, efforts beyond marketing will need to be done.

### **3. The perceived lack of “Earning” opportunities in Michigan is the primary reason college graduates will leave the state.**

As Table I shows, Earning is the second most valued index for Michigan students. It's also the index with the largest discrepancies between value and perception.

While 89% of students value Earning, only 11% agree that Michigan has broad enough employment opportunities. This indicates students are not confident about job opportunities in the state and will be tempted to leave the state to pursue their careers.

Following graduation, students often take one of two approaches to deciding on a place to live. Some students decide where they want to live, then look for a job in that place. Other students look for the best job and move to the place where that job is. - place being a secondary consideration.

When we asked survey respondents about which approach they favored, just over half (51%) of students indicated they will go where they can find the best job. Nearly a third (31%) indicated they will first choose where they want to live, then look for a job.

Therefore promoting Earning opportunities, coupled with affordability and a strong quality of place, will be a key marketing strategy in reaching emerging professionals.

### **4. Educating students about life after college in Michigan will require word of mouth, technology, and carefully crafted visits.**

The majority (80%) of survey respondents are most likely to reach out to friends & family to learn about potential areas to live. First-hand visits were a close second (79%), followed by internet sources (71%).

Figure 8, page 14, shows the sources students are most likely to use in learning about potential areas to live.



**Figure 8: Sources Used for Gathering “Life After College” Information**

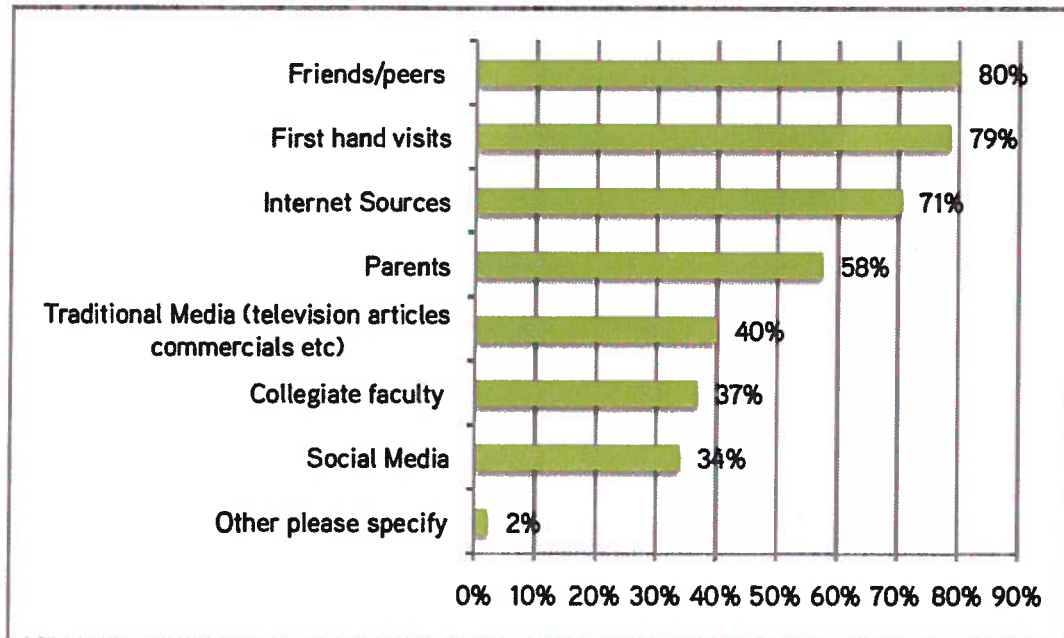
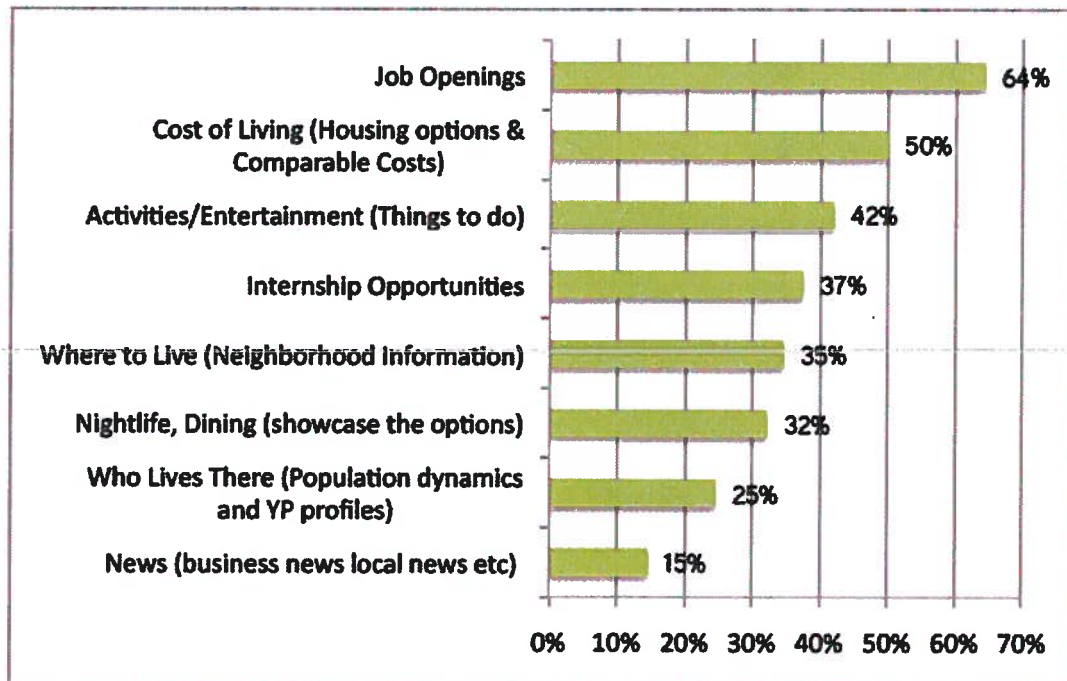


Figure 9, provides insight into what students are most interested in learning about potential areas to live after graduation.

**Figure 9: Most Important “Life After College” Information**



As Figure 8 & 9 show, in today's digital age, it will be important to use both traditional web technology and social media in unique ways to showcase job opportunities, quality of life experiences, housing information, and more.

5. Promoting specific quality of life amenities - like good-paying jobs, affordable housing, commute times, access to parks, bike and hike trails - is key to marketing post-graduate life in Michigan.

What is the next generation really looking for in a “cool city?” To help us dive deeper we asked respondents to identify what they value **MOST** in each index when considering a place to call home. Table 3, displays the top assets, in each index, that students are looking for in a community of choice.

**Table 3: Most Desired Community Assets**

Students were asked: When considering the “ (insert index) ” opportunities in a community and their impact on you choosing a place to call home, please check the **ONE** thing you value **MOST**:

		% of Agreement
<b>COST OF LIFESTYLE</b>		
Affordable housing market (home ownership)	1885	45.83%
Affordable cost of goods and services	713	17.34%
Affordable rental properties	587	14.27%
Availability of city living (downtown apartments/condos)	575	13.98%
Low taxes (property tax, sales tax, etc.)	320	7.78%
Other (please specify)	33	0.80%
Total	4113	
<b>EARNING</b>		
Good paying job opportunities	2082	50.61%
Opportunities to advance my career, not just start it	1713	41.64%
Availability of entrepreneurial support	208	5.06%
Other (please specify)	111	2.70%
Total	4114	
<b>LEARNING</b>		
Quality of K-12 education system	2168	52.57%
Availability of advanced degree programs (graduate programs)	829	20.10%
Availability of continued learning (personal enrichment)	797	19.33%
Free WiFi accessibility	239	5.80%
Other (please specify)	91	2.21%
Total	4124	
<b>SOCIAL CAPITAL</b>		
Public safety (low crime)	1216	29.59%
Close to family	979	23.83%

Presence of other young, active residents	748	18.20%
Ease of engaging with the community (get involved)	649	15.79%
A diverse make-up of residents	470	11.44%
Other (please specify)	47	1.14%
Total	4109	

#### VITALITY

<b>Variety of outdoor amenities (parks, bike &amp; hiking trails)</b>	<b>2125</b>	<b>51.54%</b>
Good environmental quality/ awareness	931	22.58%
Farmer's markets / "Buy Local" awareness	673	16.32%
Nearby natural resources	246	5.97%
Dog parks	85	2.06%
Other (please specify)	63	1.53%
Total	4123	

#### AFTER HOURS

<b>Variety of social activities (restaurants, bars, clubs, shopping, etc.)</b>	<b>1513</b>	<b>36.72%</b>
Variety of cultural activities (theaters, galleries, concerts, festivals, etc)	1380	33.50%
Thriving downtown area & stroll districts	696	16.89%
Availability of Participatory Sports (leagues, etc.)	240	5.83%
Other (please specify)	148	3.59%
Proximity to Major Sports Teams (pro teams)	143	3.47%
Total	4120	

#### AROUND TOWN

<b>Ease of commute from home to office</b>	<b>2748</b>	<b>66.83%</b>
Availability of public transportation (buses/trains)	678	16.49%
Availability of bike lanes for commuting	463	11.26%
Proximity to a major airport	149	3.62%
Other (please specify)	74	1.80%
Total	4112	

MCF should consider highlighting the highest ranking amenities in all marketing efforts to students with special emphasis on job opportunities, housing options, and recreational activities.

## CONCLUSION | Where do we go from here?

On the first page of this report, we shared the quantitative importance of growing Michigan's economy by retaining and engaging a college educated workforce.

In this study, we learned what Michigan college students are looking for, when choosing where to relocate after graduation. We learned that - in their eyes - Grand Rapids is the most attractive region in Michigan. We also learned that college students' perceptions of Michigan - on the whole - are not strong.

As the Michigan Colleges Foundation sets out to address these findings, we strongly encourage you to:

- Measure how well Michigan really scores in the seven indexes. It's possible that students' perceptions of Detroit, Lansing, and Grand Rapids are worse than the reality. By addressing these gaps, you develop strong talking points, to share what life in Michigan is really like.
- Parents, peers, college professors, and college faculty influence students' post-graduate decisions. Whenever possible, make sure that these influentials have the right information about Michigan's possibilities, so that they don't inadvertently steer students out of Michigan
- Focus on the "Convincibles." Half (50%) of all survey respondents indicated they are considering staying in the state following graduation. Another 31% are unsure. Taken together, 80% of survey respondents could be convinced to stay. **We call this group your "Convincibles," and they should be the focus of ongoing marketing initiatives.** The Convincibles see potential in Michigan and may have connections here - friends & family. As they think about life after college, the Partnership for Michigan has the opportunity to develop a more positive perception of Michigan and create stronger connections for them - making them nostalgic for Michigan before they ever have a chance to leave.

---

There's a saying in business, "It's easier to keep your current customers than it is to attract new ones." The same is true in workforce and economic development; it is more cost-effective to retain the young talent already living, studying, and working in Michigan than to convince new migrants to relocate to Michigan.

A smart investment in Michigan's future is to invest in encouraging the Convincibles to stay.





Andrew Robinson Ball

## Death treated as homicide

FAMILY SHEDS NEW DETAILS ON 84-YEAR-OLD WHO DIED AFTER BEATING AT VETERANS HOME

BY JOHN TUNISON  
JTUNISON@MLIVE.COM

GRAND RAPIDS — Deborah Keyworth hates the thought that her children's last image of their grandfather will be of his bruised body.

"When you looked at him, you knew he was beaten," she said. "He couldn't move his jaw or swallow."

Her 84-year-old father, Andrew Robinson Ball — a World War II veteran who suffered from Alzheimer's disease — died Tuesday at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans after being assaulted by another Alzheimer's patient three days earlier.

Grand Rapids police are investigating the death as a homicide. A medical examiner

determined Ball died from medical complications due to blunt force trauma. Relatives said he developed pneumonia.

Keyworth, who is Ball's step-daughter but considers herself a daughter, said she was told by staff at the veteran's home that Ball was involved in an altercation with another patient.

She said she learned more after talking with police.

"My dad did not go and provoke someone. He simply walked into the wrong room," she said.

Ball and Keyworth's mother, 87-year-old Elaine Ball, moved to the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans about a year ago after living in the East Lansing area for most of their lives.

Andrew Ball had Alzheimer's disease, and his wife has dementia, according to Keyworth.

She said he sometimes wandered on the floor where his room was located, as did others on the same floor. She believed several others assigned to the floor also had Alzheimer's.

Keyworth said staff at the

SEE DEATH, A2



Bill Kirk, public outreach coordinator for The Rapid, walks college students from The Van Andel Millennial Board through The Rapid's rooftop garden on Thursday. The Van Andel Millennial Board toured Grand Rapids hot spots Thursday and Friday to gather information on why young graduates may want to stay in Michigan versus leaving the state.

'MILLENNIALS' SCOUT  
GRAND RAPIDS, SHOWN  
THE BEST IT HAS TO OFFER

## THE PLACE TO BE

BY ZANE MCKILLIN  
ZMCKILLIN@MLIVE.COM

GRAND RAPIDS — Art-Prize public relations director Brian Burch sat in the event's headquarters Thursday and regaled a small group of college students with tales of his "big dreams" of leaving the Grand Rapids area.

Those dreams were, of course, leading up to 1997, when Burch up and left his hometown for a job and life in Chicago. It was a time, Burch recalled, when Grand Rapids had little going for it and little reason to stay.

"Grand Rapids was not a big city to me at the time," Burch said. "Grand Rapids was not a place that I could find opportunity."

But then, the kicker: "That all changed very quickly."

After four years in Chicago,

SEE PLACE, A2

Above right, college students took down on the lobby at GRiD70 while taking a tour of the facility at 70 Ionia Ave. SW on Thursday. At right, GRiD70 program manager Kyle Los speaks to the students. Far right, Art-Prize public relations director Brian Burch gets his chance to address the group.



## Not so fast with the matches

New state law bans  
burning certain  
household waste items

BY MELISSA ANDERS  
MANDERS@MLIVE.COM

LANSING — Michigan residents no longer will be allowed to openly burn certain household items under a law signed by Lt. Gov. Brian Calley on Thursday.

Starting in 180 days, it will be a state civil infraction to openly burn household waste that contains plastic, rubber, foam, chemically treated wood, textiles, electronics, chemicals or hazardous materials.

Burning those materials can release harmful emissions and pose fire risks.

Though some municipalities already ban the practice, others, especially in rural areas, do not regulate it.

Michigan was the last Great Lakes state that allowed residents to burn household garbage in barrels.

Open burning means "smoke and other emissions

are released directly into the air without passing through a chimney or stack," according to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

The fine is \$75 for two offenses within three years, \$150 for three offenses during that time, and \$300 for each subsequent offense in a three-year period. Fine revenues will benefit public libraries.

State law already prohibits the open burning of grass clippings and leaves in municipalities with at least 7,500 people, unless authorized by local ordinance. State law doesn't prevent rural residents from burning yard waste, cardboard and paper products, unless local municipalities prohibit it.

Before burning yard waste and other approved items, residents in the Upper Peninsula and northern Lower Peninsula must check the Department of Natural Resources to make sure burning is permitted that day.

Residents in the southern part of the state must contact their local fire department or municipality for a permit. Permits are not required if the material is in an approved container or if there is snow cover.

## Sapp says performing arts school is dream come true

BY MONICA SCOTT  
MSCOTT2@MLIVE.COM

GRAND RAPIDS — Grand Rapids pastor and chart-topping gospel singer Marvin Sapp says he was determined to make a reality of his late wife's dream of a school that linked academic education with performing and fine arts.

It was a dream he shared with MaLinda Sapp for the Grand Rapids Ellington Academy of Arts and Technology (GREAAAT) charter that will open in September. He said they both understood the benefits of encouraging students' interests and abilities.

"My wife worked very hard on this concept of implementing the arts in a core curriculum focused on academic excellence," said Sapp about his wife, who died from cancer in 2010. "I believe very strongly she has been there with us guiding our team."

"I am excited because we have created something in Ellington that is going to be unique to West Michigan and



Marvin Sapp, pastor and gospel singer, performs during the Giant Awards last month. Sapp announced he will be opening the Grand Rapids Ellington Academy of Arts and Technology charter school this fall, linking academic excellence with the arts.

change how young people learn."

The school's arts curriculum will include instrumental music, vocal music, dance, graphic arts and theatre arts.

SEE SCHOOL, A2



ADVICE  
CLASSIFIED ADS  
COMICS  
LOTTERY

A12 NATION/WORLD  
B6 OBITUARIES  
A10 OPINION  
A2 REGION

A5 SPORTS  
A4 STOCKS  
A8 TV  
A3 WEATHER

B1  
A7  
A13  
A12

### News updates 24/7

Check MLive.com for the latest in breaking news, provocative commentary, reader comments and more.



## **The place to be: 'Millennials' scout Grand Rapids, shown the best it has to offer**

April 19, 2012

**By Zane McMillin, Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS, MI — ArtPrize public relations director Brian Burch sat in the event's headquarters Thursday and regaled a small group of college students with tales of his "big dreams" of leaving the Grand Rapids area.

Those dreams were, of course, leading up to 1997, when Burch up and left his hometown for a job and life in Chicago. It was a time, Burch recalled, when Grand Rapids had little going for it, and little reason to stay.

"Grand Rapids was not a big city to me at the time," Burch said. "Grand Rapids was not a place that I could find opportunity."

But then, the kicker: "That all changed very quickly."

After four years in Chicago, Burch told the group of eight students, he returned home to find things had changed. Concert venues had sprung up, a nightlife was growing and an arts scene was taking root, among others.

"I came back here," Burch said, "and the city had changed in that very short amount of time."

### **A whirlwind tour**

It was a tale right up the alley of Burch's student audience.

They were eight members of the [Van Andel Millennial Board](#), an endowed youth council comprising students from 14 private Michigan colleges, including several in Grand Rapids and West Michigan.

---

An arm of the Michigan Colleges Foundation, the Millennial Board works to "develop and implement ... strategies to attract and retain students in Michigan," according to its website.

The Millennial Board's ArtPrize visit Thursday was one leg of a rigorous, two-day whirlwind tour of sorts to sites around Grand Rapids that, in some way, highlighted parts of the city that would attract a young, right-out-of-college crowd.

The group started their day at The Rapid bus system's Central Station, where the group learned about recent service changes and the upcoming bus rapid transit Silver Line.



Other stops Thursday morning included a tour of design hub [GRid70](#), where bustling creatives from the likes of Amway, Steelcase and Meijer worked as the Millennial Board members looked on.

From there, the group walked over to ArtPrize's headquarters at 41 Sheldon Blvd. Other Thursday stops will include meeting Mayor George Heartwell, touring the [West Michigan Center for Arts & Technology](#) and attending the [Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce's](#) Politics and Pints event.

"I think our visits today have, in large part, they speak to the heart of what the Van Andel Millennial Board is about," said Casey Hoffman, an Albion College senior who chairs the Millennial Board, "and that is going against a common stereotype that Michigan and Michigan's cities, including Grand Rapids, is washed up, and that's simply not true."

### **What students want**

Hoffman said the Millennial Board recently conducted a survey of college students across the state to see what drives their post-graduation planning. To wit: Where would they want to live?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, survey respondents highlighted a city's vibrant nightlife, leisure activities and recreation as traits desired most in addition to a steady job.

"It's more than just about working, it's about living," Hoffman said, "and that's what cities like Grand Rapids are offering students and graduates who want to be a part of Michigan's ethos."

Holland native and Hope College senior Courtney Dernberger, a Millennial Board member, said she has heard from multiple friends that plan to move to Grand Rapids upon graduating from college, largely because of what it has come to embody.

"The biggest thing I hear is just a community, and that they can have people that they feel comfortable with and places to congregate — Founders Brewery, things like that," Dernberger said. "And I think Grand Rapids offers that. It's growing in its ability to offer that."

### **Showing off**

Kyle Los, program manager at [GRid70](#), played tour guide Thursday as he took the Millennial Board throughout the design hub on Ionia Avenue.

The tour included a stop at Meijer's Culinary Innovation center, a modern-looking test kitchen in [GRid70](#) where the company tests out its gastronomic concoctions.

"There's a focus on the future generations from a product standpoint, but more importantly, from an innovation standpoint," Los said.

“For us, the next generation is going to be the ones who are innovating, so we need to be focusing on how these people work, where they work, and we want that to be a part of the community here.”

For Hoffman, at least, the two-day tour was all but certain to reinforce that need.

"Michigan has a lot to offer, Grand Rapids has a lot to offer," he said, "and I think we're going to find in future years young people... are going to be in the state and staying in cities like Grand Rapids."





## **After seeing the best of Grand Rapids, Millennials determine if the city is the place for them**

April 20, 2012

**By Maria Amante, Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS, MI -- Is Grand Rapids the place to be?

"Perhaps" is the answer given by members of the Van Andel Millennial Board following a whirlwind, two-day tour of the city.

Fifteen students from 14 schools are on the board, looking for solutions to Michigan's brain drain of young people across the state.

The students have asked their peers what they look for in a place post-graduation. They're now touring the state looking for those qualities in a town. Grand Rapids was their first stop, Lansing is up next.

There's obviously a vibrant number of job opportunities here, said Lee Caldwell, a student at Kalamazoo College.

"(I want to tell them) you don't have to worry about ethics and morals -- they're already here," he said. "You get a good neighborhood feel all across the city."

He enjoyed visiting Grand Rapids and the city's companies and looks forward to telling his friends back at Kalamazoo College about the city, that there's a town that shares the values and passion of the school with available jobs.

However, he has his heart set on someplace else.

"I want to take my talents back home to Flint," he said.

The passion in the city is attractive to Megan Vanderkerkhove, an Adrian student from Troy.

Visiting the facilities at The Rapid, she said she was inspired by the devotion workers had for public transportation and Grand Rapids as a whole.

"I could see myself here," said Anthony Manno, a Hillsdale student.

He looks forward to seeing the city expand in population and grow.

"That feel of a bigger city, making more events, draws people out," Manno said.